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SUBJECT: EASTERN INDONESIA: PROSPEROUS JUSTICE PARTY (PKS) TRIES TO
EXPAND BEYOND ITS ISLAMIC PARTY BRAND

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Accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In the regions beyond Java, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) are focused on attracting new members beyond the Muslim students and professionals who makeup the party's backbone. On the Hindu island of Bali and the Muslim-majority province of Gorontalo, local PKS leaders highlight the party's emphasis on public service and respect for local cultures as the party's primary attractions to voters. The party also strives to promote local candidates who represent community interests rather than Jakarta-based cadres who are perceived as putting party first. Regional party leaders are confident that PKS's focus on service will overcome suspicions about its Islamic party brand. End Summary.

Public Services Promote Party's Image

¶2. (SBU) The Chairman of PKS Bali, Heri Sukarmeini, explained to visiting Surabaya Principal Officer what makes PKS different from other political parties: Established in 2002, the party's membership is young and has no ties to the old order; and PKS creates a new "paradigm" among political parties which brand themselves as "Islamic parties." Heri admitted that Islamic culture and values dominated the party's organizational culture and that non-Muslim voters remained skeptical of PKS because of its strong image as an Islamic party. He argued, however, that PKS's emphasis on public services regardless of religion or ethnicity was successfully challenging those images throughout Bali and Eastern Indonesia.

¶3. (SBU) PKS's emergency humanitarian response unit PKPU (Pos Keadilan Peduli Umat) has helped the party reach out to local communities. Gorontalo's PKS Chairman Abdul Rahman Bahmid observed that PKS usually received more votes in areas where natural disasters or conflict had occurred because of PKPU's activities. He explained that PKS made significant electoral gains in Jakarta after widespread flooding and in Maluku and North Maluku following inter-ethnic conflicts. PKS Bali's Heri noted that a number of large companies were channeling their donations to aid the victims of natural disasters through PKPU because of its reliability. He added that PKS's community-based programs supporting education, healthy mothers, and other services were also strengthening the party's image amongst local communities.

Party Membership and Candidates

14. (SBU) As with most areas, PKS supporters in Bali are primarily private company professionals and Muslim university students who are recruited to the party through a student organization KAMMI (Kasatuan Aski Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia) -- an acronym that matches the Indonesian word (kami) for "we" or "us." Heri observed that PKS Bali is getting increasing support from civil servants, fisherman, and farmers who have experienced PKS's community services. Heri added that PKS is an "open" party and that non-Muslims could become party leaders, although few have done so. The Chairman of PKS in Papua is one example.

15. (SBU) Unlike the major Indonesian political parties, PKS has a reputation for promoting local party members as candidates rather than Jakarta-based cadres. In Bali, PKS is planning to nominate a priest as its legislative candidate. There are exceptions. The PKS candidate in West Sumabawa, Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB), was a PKS cadre from Banten because PKS was relatively new in NTB and had yet to identify strong local candidates. A small party, PKS is also forced into coalitions with the bigger political parties to nominate a candidate, and thus will support a "compromise" candidate.

Respect for Local Cultures

16. (SBU) The Gorontalo PKS Chairman Abdul Rahman Bahid observed to visiting Pol-Econ Officer that the party's Islamic credentials did not guarantee support in Muslim-majority areas. Many in Gorontalo still perceive PKS as a closed and exclusive party that did not try to accommodate local traditions. In an effort to overcome this perception, Gorontalo PKS plans to host a cultural appreciation week and present awards to local cultural leaders. In Bali, Heri said PKS is well-respected and received because the Hindu community knows from experience that PKS supports local cultures.

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